

Message Text

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AMEMBASSY MADRID

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

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C O N F I D E N T I A L LISBON 7635

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PO

SUBJECT: POLITICAL PRISONERS AND AMNESTY

REF: LISBON 2258 (DTG 181700Z APR 75)

SUMMARY: NOV 25 COUP ATTEMPT AND ITS AFTERMATH HAVE FOCUSED INCREASING PUBLIC ATTENTION ON QUESTION OF POLITICAL PRISONERS IN PORTUGAL AS COMMUNISTS AND FAR LEFT ENGAGE IN NOISY CAMPAIGN TO EFFECT RELEASE OF THOSE ARRESTED.

GOVERNMENT HAS MOVED TO GET STATUS OF PRE-NOV 25 PRISONERS OFF DEAD CENTER. A NUMBER OF SPINOLIST OFFICERS ARRESTED FOLLOWING MARCH 11 ABORTIVE RIGHT WING COUP HAVE BEEN RELEASED FROM PRISON AND HAVE RETURNED TO ACTIVE DUTY ASSIGNMENTS. PROBABILITY EXISTS

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THAT GOP WILL SOLVE PROBLEM POSED BY ISSUE BY GRANTING AMNESTY.
END SUMMARY.

1. POLITICAL PRISONERS IN SPOTLIGHT: QUESTION OF POLITICAL PRISONERS IN PORTUGAL IS ASSUMING INCREASING IMPORTANCE IN WAKE OF NOV 25 ABORTIVE COUP ATTEMPT. ARREST OF MANY OF BEST KNOWN FIGURES OF MILITARY LEFT AND NOISY EFFORTS BY COMMUNISTS AND FAR LEFT TO HAVE THEM FREED HAS BROUGHT INTO OPEN QUESTION OF WHAT TO DO WITH LARGE NUMBERS OF PORTUGUESE WHO, EVEN BEFORE NOV 25, WERE BEING HELD FOR ESSENTIALLY POLITICAL REASONS.

2. HOW MANY AND WHO?: DETERMINATION OF THE NUMBER OF PERSONS CURRENTLY BEING HELD IS DIFFICULT, SINCE NOT ALL ARRESTS--BEFORE OR AFTER NOV 25--WERE REPORTED IN PRESS, AND MANY RELEASES HAVE SIMILARLY BEEN MADE WITH MINIMUM PUBLICITY. EMBASSY'S BEST ESTIMATE IS THAT THERE ARE SOMETHING UNDER 2000 POLITICAL PRISONERS IN PORTUGAL, WHO CAN BE BROKEN DOWN BY NUMBER AND BASIS FOR DETENTION AS FOLLOWS:

--FORMER MEMBERS OF POLITICAL POLICE (PIDE/DGS), HIGH RANKING MEMBERS OF PORTUGUESE LEGION, AND HOLDERS OF RESPONSIBLE GOVERNMENT POSITIONS UNDER FORMER REGIME: MOST OF THE APPROXIMATELY 1,800 PRISONERS IN THIS CATEGORY WERE ARRESTED SHORTLY AFTER APRIL 25, 1974 REVOLUTION. THEY HAVE NEVER BEEN FORMALLY CHARGED OR BROUGHT TO TRIAL.

--CONSERVATIVE MILITARY AND CIVILIANS ALLEGEDLY IMPLICATED IN THE SEPT 28, 1974 AFFAIR AND MARCH 11, 1975 ABORTIVE RIGHT WING COUP: COMMISSIONS OF INQUIRY INTO BOTH EVENTS HAVE COMPLETED THEIR INVESTIGATIONS BUT HAVE NEVER RELEASED FULL FINDINGS. NO FORMAL CHARGES HAVE BEEN BROUGHT AGAINST THE 120 TO 160 INDIVIDUALS IN THIS CATEGORY, NOR HAVE THEY BEEN BROUGHT TO TRIAL. DATT SOURCES SAY THAT ONLY FIVE MILITARY DETAINEES ARE LEFT IN PRISON FROM THIS GROUP.

--NOVEMBER 25 DETAINEES: OFFICIAL MILITARY SOURCES HAVE RELEASED THE NAMES OF 145 OFFICERS AND ENLISTED MEN ARRESTED FOLLOWING NOV 25. AT LEAST 18 CIVILIANS HAVE ALSO BEEN ARRESTED IN CONNECTION WITH THEIR ROLE IN COUP OR FOR POSSESSION OF ILLEGAL MILITARY WEAPONS.

3. CAMPAIGN TO FREE NOV 25 DETAINEES: IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING
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LIFTING OF STATE OF SIEGE IMPOSED DURING COUP, FAMILIES OF NOV 25 DETAINEES, AIDED BY SUCH GROUPS AS COMMUNIST-LINED "UNITARY MOVEMENT OF INTELLECTUAL WORKERS"(MUTI) AND LEFTIST PRESS, LAUNCHED CAMPAIGN TO EFFECT PRISONERS' RELEASE. TO DATE CAMPAIGN HAS INCLUDED:

--WELL PUBLICIZED DEMONSTRATIONS OUTSIDE PRISONS BY PRISONERS' FAMILIES.

--CIRCULATION OF PETITIONS DEMANDING PRISONERS' RELEASE.

--DAILY ARTICLES IN LEFT PRESS ON DETAINEES' ACTIVITIES.

--FREQUENT PRESS REPORTS OF ALLEGEDLY INADEQUATE PRISON

ACCOMMODATIONS, SANITARY AND MEDICAL FACILITIES, FOOD, AND ACCESS TO LEGAL COUNSEL.

4. GOVERNMENT REACTION: GOVERNMENT REACTION TO COMMUNIST CAMPAIGN HAS BEEN MEASURED. IT HAS DENIED CHARGES OF ILL TREATMENT AND INADEQUACY OF PRISON CONDITIONS, AND HAS REMAINED FIRM ON THE POSITION THAT SOME PRISONERS MUST REMAIN INCOMMUNICADO UNTIL AFTER INQUIRY. ON THE OTHER HAND, COSTA GOMES HAS PERSONALLY RECEIVED MEMBERS OF PRISONERS' FAMILIES TO DISCUSS COMPLAINTS AND HAS ACCEPTED PETITIONS DEMANDING DETAINEES' RELEASE. REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL HAS CALLED ON COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO NOV 25 RAPIDLY TO CONCLUDE ITS INVESTIGATIONS SO THAT PRISONERS MAY BE TRIED OR RELEASED. OVER A DOZEN PRISONERS HAVE BEEN RELEASED ON THE GROUNDS THAT EVIDENCE DID NOT JUSTIFY THEIR DETENTION. FAMILY VISITS TO SOME OF THE PRISONERS WERE AUTHORIZED BY REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL ON DEC 23.

5. ACTION ON OTHER PRISONERS: IMPRISONMENT OF NOV 25 DETAINEES HAS HAD SPIN-OFF BENEFITS FOR THOSE PRISONERS BEING HELD--AND LARGELY IGNORED--PRIOR TO NOVEMBER COUP. EMBOLDENED BY NEW BALANCE OF POLITICAL-MILITARY FORCES, AND INCENSED BY MEDIA OUTCRY OVER IMPRISONMENT OF NOV 25 DETAINEES, FAMILIES AND FRIENDS OF THOSE PREVIOUSLY ARRESTED HAVE DEMANDED THEY BE FREED. GOVERNMENT ITSELF HAS TAKEN STEPS TO GET PROCESSING OF PRE-NOV 25 DETAINEES OFF DEAD CENTER:
--REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL MEMBER LTC COSTA NEVES ANNOUNCED DEC 17 THAT TRIALS FOR THOSE ARRESTED AFTER APRIL 1974 COUP AND THOSE IMPLICATED IN EVENTS OF SEPTEMBER 28 AND MARCH 11 WOULD BEGIN IN JANUARY.
--SOME FORMER MEMBERS OF THE CAETANO GOVERNMENT, INCLUDING
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FORMER MINISTER OF DEFENSE SILVA CUNHA, HAVE BEEN RELEASED FOR LACK OF EVIDENCE. GEN KAULZA DE ARRIAGA HAS REPORTEDLY BEEN OFFERED HIS FREEDOM UNDER CONDITION THAT HE REFRAIN FROM POLITICAL ACTIVITY, BUT HAS REFUSED.

--A NUMBER OF OFFICERS FORMERLY CLOSE TO EX-PRESIDENT SPINOLA--INCLUDING LTC ALMEIDA BRUNO, LTC RICARDO DURAO, MAJ MANUEL MONJE, AND MAJ NUNO BIVAR--WERE ALSO RELEASED FOR LACK OF EVIDENCE TO IMPLICATE THEM IN MARCH 11 COUP ATTEMPT. THESE OFFICERS HAVE SINCE RETURNED TO ACTIVE DUTY WITH THE ARMY.

6. AMNESTY: CONTROVERSY OVER POLITICAL PRISONERS HAS FUELED SPECULATION THAT GOVERNMENT, RATHER THAN UNDERGO THE ORDEAL OF LONG, EMOTIONAL, AND POTENTIALLY EMBARRASSING SERIES OF TRIALS, WILL DECIDE TO GRANT A GENERAL PARDON TO THOSE INVOLVED IN MARCH 11 AND NOV 25 COUP ATTEMPTS. REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL SPOESMAN SOUSA E CASTRO TACITLY ADMITTED DEC 22 THAT SUBJECT WAS BEING DISCUSSED BY RC, ADDING THAT SUCH A PARDON WOULD INCLUDE NOT ONLY THOSE ACTUALLY UNDER

ARREST, BUT ALSO THOSE FOR WHOM WARRANTS OF ARREST HAD BEEN
ISSUED (SUCH AS SPINOLA).

7. COMMENT: POLITICAL PRISONER ISSUE IS KNOTTY ONE WITH
CONSIDERABLE EMBARRASSMENT POTENTIAL. PART OF GOP'S RELUCTANCE
TO PROCEED WITH TRIALS IS SIMPLE INEFFICIENCY IN THE FACE OF
A BIG, POLITICALLY SENSITIVE TASK. MORE IMPORTANT IS LIKELIHOOD
THAT TRIALS WOULD OPEN PANDOR'S BOX--ESPECIALLY FOR MILITARY,
MANY OF WHOM ARE ALLEGED TO HAVE HAD UNSAVORY ASSOCIATIONS WITH
POLITICAL POLICE IN PAST. SOME FOR OF AMNESTY WILL PROBABLY
BE THE GOP'S SOLUTION.
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